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“Attitude is everything”-A Critique of English Language Teaching and Learning in India

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Abstract

Recently an ELT conference organized by one of the oldest English Language Teachers' organization in the country, discussed elaborately on Indian ELT. The discussions focused primarily on the content of a Concept Note published prior to the conference with a startling opening statement: "English language teaching has failed in our country, not miserably but significantly." The presentations during the conference focused on topics highlighted in the Concept Note which included: Should we have an Indian ELT; How are other languages taught in India; Teacher autonomy; Use of technology; Research and Teacher development. But it was rather intriguing to note the complete absence of any mention of a closely related topic-namely the debate surrounding the need for dropping English studies in the university departments of English in India.

The investigator, a teacher educator by profession drawing on his two-decade long experience of preparing teacher trainees and interacting with students and teachers in schools and colleges have come to the conclusion that what ails English Language teaching in India is not something related to pedagogy alone as it is often assumed. The fault the investigator in this paper argues lies in the 'attitude' of learners and the community and very little on pedagogy.

The paper commences with a review of the profile of learners of English in schools and colleges. It focuses on the socio-economic background and its impact on learners, the divergent experience the learners hailing from well off and disadvantaged families have, the effect of English language competence on social mobility and the effect of English language instruction sans cultural baggage on aspirant learners.

The review reveals that the time has come to stop shoving under the carpet the truth that teaching English in India implies a cultural-transformational component and the acquisition of a global perspective which is likely to challenge one's own ethnic and linguistic affiliations.

It is hoped that the paper will turn the lime light on a conveniently ignored 'issue' related to the teaching of English in India. It can possibly open the eyes of authorities to the true reality and prompt them to cogitate deeply on setting up a dual strand for teaching English in schools and colleges in India viz; General English competence for developing the ability to communicate and an Advanced English competence for those interested in higher studies.

Key words: Attitude, Competence, Culture, English, Learners

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“Language attitudes may have an effect on second language or foreign language learning.”
-The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching

Introduction

A leading recruiter for teachers of English in Asia, ‘International Teacher Plus’, in their website listed five challenges of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) which includes lack of resources, limited support, loneliness, language barrier and non-availability of sufficient time. They perceive teaching students a new language as a “delicate and time-consuming process” and concludes with an enticing statement that teaching ESL is one of the best ways of immersing oneself in a new culture and meeting new people. While this an alluring invitation for prospective job seekers, Pesce’s, popular post in ‘Busy Teacher’ viewed by more than one lakh eighty thousand visitors perceives ESL teaching as one that could face a multitude of problems. The investigator, a teacher educator by profession during his two-decade long career found the seven common problems listed by Pesce quite similar to the ones perceived while teaching English in classrooms in India. (1) The seven problems which Pesce listed down along with solutions include: Students speaking more of the native language than English; Students taking control of the lesson; One student particularly dominating the lesson; Too dependent students; Bored and unmotivated students; Those who arrive late and disrupt the class; Students who fail to do homework. Here, it would only be redundant to state that teachers are problem solvers and it is up to them to find solutions for each problem listed above. In this context, what a professor of Education of Michigan State University observed way back in 1997 is worth quoting: Teachers who are most respected are ones who have discovered how to make students passionate participants in the instructional process. (Lanier,1997)

Well, Lanier’s observation is fine and good. After having read between the lines of the problems listed above, the investigator pondered on own attempt at making students passionate in the instructional process related to teaching English as a Second language in classrooms at different levels for over two decades. From hindsight, it became clear that while teaching a language like English in India, it is impossible to overlook the fact that one is engaged in a cultural transformation of the learners which is in every possibility likely to affect their linguistic and ethnic affiliations.

The problem

More than a decade ago, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) was introduced in schools in India. Within days of the policy decision, curriculum designers prepared Course Books matching the Instructional objectives with activities and learning experiences to match CCE. So today, the classroom teacher in India, preparing a lesson plan based on ‘outcome-based instruction’ assiduously incorporates both formative and summative evaluation besides maintaining a record of the performance of the learners who is assessed on several abilities following the CCE

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format. This then implies that the student who begins to learn English from Class I and continues it till Class XII should by the end of schooling possess the ability to use the English language with a fair degree of competence. But, unfortunately it is not so. When the average school learner particularly from resource poor and rural backgrounds secure admission for Undergraduate courses, the college authorities have noticed that many students particularly from the rural sector have abysmally poor communication skills in English even though their school Grade Card shows that they have secured a good grade for English.

Are teachers responsible? Is there a fundamental flaw in pedagogy? Incidentally, a recent International Conference organized by one of the leading English language teacher associations (ELTAI) had for its theme 'Indian ELT'. The papers presented in the conference was based on a Concept Note which made a rather startling statement that English language teaching has not only failed in our country miserably, but 'significantly'. Here, the investigator prefers to disagree.

Review of studies

What follows is a brief review of studies followed by the investigator's attempt to review learner profile with relation to socio-economic background and its impact on learning English, the effect of input rich and input environments on English language competence and the impact of attitude and aptitude. The data for the study was drawn from two-decade long field notes, observation, informal interactions with learners, teachers, school authorities, impressions of teacher trainees and review of related studies in journals.

Language and Culture

Gupta *et al* (2015) in a compilation of research articles on English Studies in Indian Higher Education pointed out the increasing emphasis on education for employment and the demand for English language proficiency and skills ever since the Indian state and economy positioned themselves vis-a-vis the globalization process. (p. x)

Gupta (2015) quoting research pointed out how 'subaltern students' especially those hailing from rural backgrounds tend to remain silent in the English classroom. This was attributed to the different levels of language proficiency of those possessing a higher cultural capital of English and ones hailing from areas prone to use the vernacular only.

In an Anthropod Podcast, Benjamin Bean in a conversation with Jonathan Rosa about racio-linguistic ideologies, pointed out how coloniality manifests in educational spaces.

It has been found that language can influence cultural identity (Hatoss, 2003). Research has also found that language plays a significant role in determining the identity of a person. (Lobaton, 2012). In Asia for instance, those proficient in English, a second language is seen as a new class of people. As early as 2009, Johnson discussing the globalization of English highlighted the fact that many see English as an instrument for economic success or the creator of new

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inequality class.

According to Wyatt (2009) culture can be expressed through the language. That is to say, if a person desires to become a member of a certain society, he/she must first understand the culture and language of the society. Concluding a discussion of English as a Global Language and the Effects on Culture and Identity, Alfarhan (2016) pointed out that with globalization many second language learners are experiencing a loss of cultural identity.

With reference to students in China, Wang (2011) found that to improve oral English and realize the objective of communication, vast reading, mastery of language material and acquaintance with western culture is essential. Brown (2007) asserted that acquiring a second language is acquiring a second culture.

To Damen (1987) cross cultural awareness is a kind of force that moves a culture learner across the acculturation continuum. The movement is from a state of no understanding of or hostility to a new culture to near total understanding to multi-culturalism. (p. 141)

Teaching English and cultural baggage

Wierzbicka (2016) discussed the cultural baggage of English and its significance in the world at large. After exploring the links between Anglo/English cultural scripts and culture specific values, it pointed out the dangers inherent in regarding English as a 'culture-neutral' medium of international communication.

The investigator recently published the findings of a study which attempted a review of the teaching of English sans cultural baggage in the state of Kerala- in tribal areas, by a teachers' association (ELTIF), in a native faculty immersion programme and in government-run schools in the state of Kerala. The study found that the different strategies employed had advantages and flaws. (Praveen,2022)

Variations in Teacher Type and its effect on learning English

The investigator attempted a review of learners' background prior to joining a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) programme in English in colleges of teacher Education in Kerala State, while teaching in different colleges of Teacher Education. This was continued during viva voce examinations, while serving as external examiner for practical examination in different colleges and also during visits for academic purposes. It was found that on an average, each academic year 40 percent of the students who register for the B.Ed course in English particularly in Kerala State are ones with a Post Graduate Degree in English Language and Literature; 25 percent of students invariably have a background in Functional English and 35 percent are ones with a background in English Language and Literature at the Bachelor of Arts level.

Interactions with practising teacher educators have revealed that those with a background in English Literature perform better particularly during the compulsory component of the B.Ed programme, namely Practice Teaching. Discussions and interactions with practising teachers of English during workshops and seminars, where the investigator served as Resource Person revealed the following distinctly different types of teachers.: A-The Subject Smart and B- The Pragmatic Practitioner currently in service:

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A.The Subject Smart

The Subject Smart teachers are ones who have an inherent motivation, have a great love for the English Language and British culture and are ones willing to take extra pains to update their knowledge. They also find great pride in their own command of the language. A few other distinct traits and characteristics are listed below:

- a) Adept at drawing on one's own experience of reading literary texts for illustrating ideas while teaching in the English classroom.
- b) Receptive to changes in English language use both in India and global scenarios including ones seen in the sphere of mass media and social media.
- c) Possessing the 'habit' of regularly reading leading magazines and newspapers in English, watching films and television programmes in English, and showing a thorough familiarity with British, American and European culture and tradition. Culture here is perceived in relation to the definition given by Sir Edward B. Tylor (1871): "Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society."
- d)Willing to take the extra effort to identify appropriate resources from the Internet for making the topic they intend to teach with plenty of illustration so that learning becomes concrete and interesting for the learner. Here, it may be noted that teachers who are successful in effectively exploiting resources are ones who possess the 'habit' referred to above.
- e)Show a strong preference for imported ESL teaching methods and strategies advocated by the British Council, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, IATEFL, TESOL and American English.

B. The Pragmatic Practitioner

Those possessing a pragmatic perspective with regard to the English languages are ones with a firm belief that the sole purpose for teaching English in India is to develop the ability in learners to communicate. They have a distinct aversion for the 'elite' status enjoyed by those who have a thorough command of the English language. In fact, such teachers 'graciously' lower the performance standards of their learners in the class and are found to be highly satisfied if the learner is able to communicate even though the language used by the learner is shorn of grace in terms of choice of vocabulary, tone, accent and pronunciation. A few other distinct traits and characteristics are listed below:

- a) Tend to make a liberal use of the mother tongue and local texts for teaching the English Course Book.
- b) Rarely focuses on native like pronunciation in own usage and of those by the learner in the classroom and never bothers to consciously teach the pronunciation of a new word.
- c)Show a strong tendency to pass over/ fail to focus on concepts/topics in which the prescribed Course Books have British cultural connotations.
- d) Seldom projects oneself as one who can serve as a role model for helping learners

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acquire native culture and manners. (2)

e) Show a strong preference for Bilingualism, Translation, Code switching and Translanguaging. (3)

Here, it is worth recalling Sanderson (1983) who delineated the good language teacher as one who uses the target language predominantly, whose pronunciation is good and clear and ensures that own students involve themselves in activities. Shishavan and Sadeghi (2009) for instance found that those with sound subject matter knowledge, tended to teach effectively and was more successful. To Borg (2006) socio affective factors enable teachers establish good rapport with own students. In short, all such studies and similar studies imply that a teacher of English who is likely to be effective are ones who have good socio-affective skills, thorough pedagogical knowledge, deep subject matter knowledge and personal qualities appropriate to be perceived as role model.

The investigator, a decade ago, attempted to classify Indian teachers of English using a metaphor from soccer: 'Strikers', 'Midfielders' and 'Defenders'- each with their own potential to score a 'goal' from their respective positions. Nine specific characteristics were identified. One which is relevant to the topic under discussion is as follows. The 'Strikers' have a gut feeling that the English language holds the key to an elite status and socio-economic mobility. The 'Midfielders' tended to believe that the English language holds the key to intellectual development and socio-cultural integration. The 'Defenders' take for granted that a good knowledge of the English language can help one make both ends meet. (Praveen,2008)

Perceived learner differences in ESL classrooms

Since the mid 1990's the investigator had been teaching English, and had interacted with teachers of English at different levels, visited class rooms, taught and observed classes being engaged by teachers of English in schools and colleges in different districts in Kerala State. Certain common characteristics found among English language learners in India during visits to institutions at the primary, secondary, higher secondary and Under Graduate levels in other States in India are listed below:

Influence of background: input rich / input poor environments

There are households in India where parents subscribe to newspapers and magazines in English with the hope that their children will read and empower themselves. Such parents invariably install a cable TV connection which lends scope for watching entertainment channels in English. Some parents even watch English movies with subtitles along with their children hoping that they pick up snatches of good English usage. Such parents besides being educated, aspire for social mobility and yearn for their children to get better jobs for which, English is essential. To foster in their children a receptive attitude and overcome the inhibition to speak in English, such parents occasionally converse in English with family members.

The children hailing from such families are in many ways better placed to learn a language like

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English taught in school and given a chance they even interact in English with peers. Here, besides possessing the right 'attitude', they have the privilege of coming from input rich environments.

There are many families particularly in rural areas with first generation learners attending schools. Some of them have been lured to schools through offers of free education, free notes book, free uniform and free meals too. For many of them, an essential first step to success, is developing the ability to read and write. Once they become literate, with an ability to communicate, the next hurdle they have to overcome is to acquire words and develop the ability to use English which is seldom heard outside the English classroom. In learning any language, we know, that the learner has to consciously develop a good vocabulary. That means learning a word, its spelling, its pronunciation, its meaning and the context in which it appears. This is strictly a conscious process and without a modicum of interest or motivation no one will develop own repertoire of vocabulary. Practitioners know that developing vocabulary happens when one develops the reading habit beginning with the English Course Book. And through conscious learning, one picks up snatches of sentences and in tune with Chomsky's hypothesis of LAD, the foundation is set for creating sentences and communicating in English. Here a motivated first-generation learner with the right 'attitude' will be more receptive and willing to consciously learn new words which is likely to help in future communicative situations.

The opportunity to listen to or read newspapers or magazines in English is extremely limited for many first-generation learners whose parents rarely take the trouble to subscribe to a daily newspaper. They may have a television set at home but rarely do they switch it on to watch a programme or movie in English. There are also instances where parents despise their children using a foreign language at home or flaunting habits, manners etc. that are related to British culture. Such a scenario is least conducive for learning/ acquiring the English language which definitely has a cultural component. One can only imagine the impact such an impoverished environment and 'attitude' can have on learning a language like English. That is to say, the absence of a favourable and encouraging community, its members, particularly school going children are not likely to improve their competence in using English.

Differences in input received and its impact on development of competence in using English

Educationists will concur that in any learning scenario, the effort put by the teachers and the school/college authorities are only one strand of the educational goal. This should go parallel with the effort on the part of the learners, ably supported by parents. Any skill we know requires practice and when English is seldom used in the community of learners coming from resource poor environments, they cannot improve. Here, to become successful the learner has to make a conscious effort to use the language on a daily basis both for speaking and writing along with regular inputs in the form of reading and listening texts in English. The failure to do so can result in a vast majority of learners who have attended school failing to pick up the basics of the English language. And by the time they grow up, they soon realize that without a command of the English

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language which can help them get a better job or even aid in social mobility they feel disheartened. Some who do not lose hope look forward to empowerment programmes in English after teaching. They even hopelessly dream that by attending such a programme they will transform their ability to use English overnight.

Influence of Intrinsic motivation and Extrinsic motivation

Rewards we know can motivate people. But sometimes without external factors, such as reward or punishment, individuals may be motivated by personal satisfaction or enjoyment which is an example of intrinsic motivation. (Healthline). With reference to learning a second language like English, sometimes individuals develop a liking for the language or its culture and may derive great satisfaction. Such learners are more receptive in the English classroom and are alert to informal learning opportunities thrown open through the media or everyday social interaction. In fact, Gardner as early as 1985 reported findings of studies which showed that positive attitudes and motivation are related to success in second language learning.

We usually come across individuals who are motivated by external factors like money, fame, grade etc. and with relation to learning a language like English, they show a willingness and patience to put in extra effort to learn. Such individuals are said to be extrinsically motivated. It has also been found that such individuals continue to perform a task even though it may not turn out to be rewarding. (Very well mind)

Discussing attitude to second language learning, Ahmed (1985) identified two factors related to motivation: These include the communicative need of the learner and his attitude towards the second language community. So to fulfil own professional ambitions, an individual may show no hesitation to speak the second language in a range of social situations. Further, if one possesses a favourable attitude towards the speakers of the language, one would show a desire to contact or connect with them.

Here it is worth mentioning a finding of Gardner & Lambert (1972) that there are learners who wish to integrate into the culture of its speakers. Such learners are highly motivated and are found to learn more successfully than those who learn the language as a means to getting a better job.

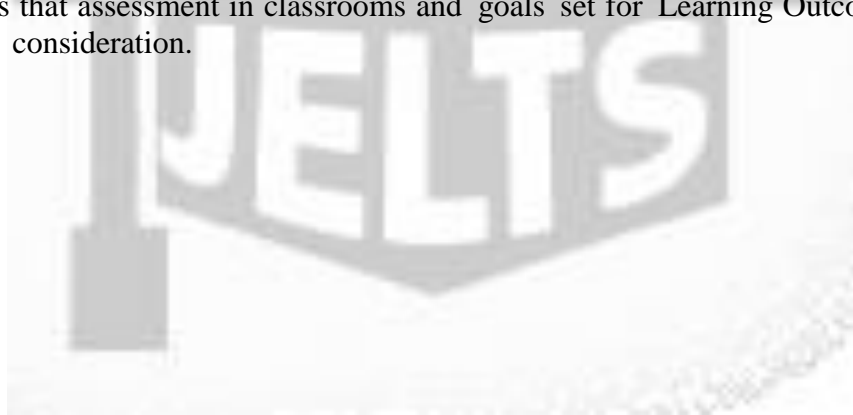
Influence of Ability and Aptitude

Ability is “the quality of being able to perform; a quality that permits or facilitates achievement or accomplishment”. (Vocabulary.com) Language we know is a skill and teachers of English try to foster in learners, the four main skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. To develop English language competence, the teacher also attempts to improve the learner’s repertoire of vocabulary and skill of language use focusing on grammatical competence and the ability to use English for communicating fluently.

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But teachers of English are unanimous in acknowledging that learners in their class rooms at different levels vary widely in their ability with regard to listening for comprehension, speaking using appropriate intonation and accent, reading texts of different genres Prose/Poetry and writing using appropriate vocabulary for communicating effectively especially for creative/argumentative writing.

Aptitude is an inherent and acquired ability implying an ease in learning or understanding; intelligence (Collins Dictionary). This then accounts for the variations in different levels of performance especially for the four language skills. This also implies that it would only be irrational to expect all learners to perform their best with regard to language use. But the unfortunate reality is that assessment in classrooms and goals set for Learning Outcomes seldom take this aspect into consideration.



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Differences in learner competence

The investigator who over the years had engaged sessions on English Language Empowerment for adult learners who had studied English in school for a minimum of twelve years, and for an additional two years at the Under Graduate level noticed them, performing at 'below average levels' with regard to reading, comprehending and interpreting different types of texts, writing texts for persuasive/argumentative writing, composing a literary piece using appropriate language and summarizing a given piece of text. Incidentally, such tasks are expected learning outcome at the Higher Secondary level. This then implies that the time has come for fixing a dual strand for learner performance for students being taught English in schools and colleges- A basic level displaying an ability to use English for communication in an increasingly globalized world and a higher level displaying an ability to use English for Higher Education and academic purposes.

Practitioners know that the prime ingredient for an improved skill in communication is a vast repertoire of 'active' vocabulary. But then vocabulary becomes 'active' for an user only if he/she regularly uses English for communication. Studies for instance have shown that lack of interaction influences student performance. (Zhang Yingying,2014) Many teachers of English in schools and colleges in India are painfully aware of the fact that during group work in the English classroom, which is a rare opportunity for learners to use English for communication while interacting with peers, many prefer to use the mother tongue. Further, only a handful of students in a class take the initiative to use English outside the classroom.

Impact of culture on learning English as a second language

Language we know carry a cultural baggage. But in many English as a Second language classrooms, this aspect is seldom given due attention. Following the growing importance of English as a world language and the infinite job opportunities opening up at a time of globalization and liberalization, every effort is underway in many educational institutions across India to develop the English language competence of learners.

The investigator attempted a study of the mode of instruction followed for English in India and found a couple of conveniently ignored 'issues' that have begun to crop up following the thrust on equity, accessibility and affordability of quality education in the country.

Many scholars have studied the attempt made by learners, teachers and institutions to identify the impact of current programmes aimed at social equality. The sociological analysis at the grass root level led the investigator to identify an ignored fact about English language learning.

The first language or mother tongue is picked up by learners through daily interaction both at home, the neighbourhood and of course the community and school. But in the case of learning a language like English which is a second language (L2) the lone opportunity many particularly from resource poor and deprived sections have is the English classroom where the teacher regularly provides speaking tasks. But students from such backgrounds seldom take the initiative to use the language outside the class.

It is a fact that one cannot pick up a language without regular interaction through speaking and writing. This of course has to be properly scaffolded by conscious learning of vocabulary, aspects of language use through daily reading and listening to English conversations, dialogues or news on

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TV or film.



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Competence sans culture

The investigator had studied the struggles of the disadvantaged for nearly two decades. The data for the study was collected from personal observation, field notes and informal interviews with own students and community members hailing from disadvantaged sections of the community. Select students academically good but economically backward were studied for a period of two to three years once they completed their course of study by maintaining a connection through alumni associations and personal student groups. This lend scope for specifically studying the problems experienced by members of the disadvantaged community who struggle to climb the social ladder and acquire a respectable competence of English language.

The investigator a teacher educator by profession has often seen students from low socio- economic backgrounds struggle to master a language like English which is increasingly perceived as a passport to success in the 21st century. A thorough knowledge and command of the language has been found to make ones journey up the social ladder rather smooth. And once such successful individuals acquire positions in respectable white-collar jobs, the urge to be treated as an equal with one's own peers become pronounced. But the struggle from an impoverished background *sans* input of 'high culture' and perhaps values too can become a great hurdle. The dissatisfaction and frustration that follows from a failure to smoothly climb up the social ladder results in a deep aversion for high-brow culture and an ingrained hatred for the rich and well off.

The 'high-brow culture' of the affluent class often gets reflected in their attire, disposition, interests, eating habits, recreation and living style. The continual struggle of the disadvantaged trying to interact with those from a 'high-brow culture' which includes the urge to acquire an impeccable command of the English language often has the effect of falling between stools as the gap between own cultural roots and of that which is ardently desired, becomes unbridgeable. Often the disadvantaged has to learn to maneuver through dividing forces like politics often with a communal flavour, caste and religion related perceptions. The natural outcome of failed aspirations will not be just a pronounced rise of negative feelings. It will be an impoverished knowledge of the English language *sans* grace and absence of cultural values held in high esteem by those from a 'highbrow culture'.

Such observation followed by reflection, led th e investigator to the conclusion that the frustration that germinates from failed aspirations in the disadvantaged, results in acquiring a negative mindset even after minor successes in climbing up from a lower strata to the next higher strata which is sometimes classified as middle class. Such individuals realize that they can never reach the pinnacle of the social ladder and will be destined to be only a partially successful nouveau rich entrant. Before long such individuals become living specimens of the 'angry young man' who lead a disillusioned life *sans* happiness, often sneering and contemptuously treating the affluent class and at times hitting rock bottom of own emotional well-being.

Can problems of the disadvantaged be solved through well- charted empowerment programmes? Can teachers of English who teach a language which has a cultural baggage help in the process? Has the time come for personal counseling for changing negative attitudes and special motivation sessions to master the English language help overcome the problems? Can

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a pragmatic approach to nurture in learners the love for English with aspects related to its culture and universal values help solve some of the problems one tends to see? Can mental wellness building sessions help find solutions? These are some of the questions that require an answer and may necessitate future research in several parts of the country. Finding a workable solution means cogitation by different stakeholders, exploratory research and designing of effective and sustainable English language empowerment programmes for the disadvantaged.

Socio-psychological implications

In the classroom with the recent introduction of Constructivist principles of language teaching, the teacher provides individual, pair and group work to enable learners to interact in English in the classroom. But unfortunately many teachers fail to realize that learners attending schools from resource poor environments have never ever made any effort to pick up the spelling, pronunciation and contextual meaning of words prescribed for study in the Coursebook. This leads to a bankruptcy of the repertoire of words essential for effective communication. So during pair work or group work, learners who lack the vocabulary remain passive and detached. That is to say, the Constructive principles turn out to have the effect of water off ducks back! Finally, when the learner takes the examination, he/she either fails or scores poor marks. This marks the commencement of hatred not only for the English language, but also for individuals who speak good English. Incidentally those who speak good English are ones who come from sections of the community who have plenty of opportunity to learn/use English outside the classroom. The handicap resulting from own failure to have the motivation to excel in English before long turns out to be a lifelong cold war between the 'haves' (those who possess better English language skills) and the 'have-not's' (those who do not have good English language skills). Soon the conflict turns to hatred of the English language and of course those who speak good English in own cultural setting and an utter disgust of the culture and habits the ones good at using English display such as polished accent, life style and values.(4) That is to say, learning a language like English in deprived circumstances has every likelihood of igniting class conflicts which for own sustenance make the 'dispossessed' openly project a false sense of nationalism that upholds own language, culture and values as superior to that of the ones who speak good English. In rare instances this goes to the extent of conflicts which is seen in some states in India where bill boards in English are vandalized or blackened.

Implications of the study

The critique has tried to show that sans the right attitude, to pick up a language with its own cultural baggage, no learner can afford to excel in English. What is important is that in order for the lackadaisical learner to improve own competence, the teacher has to refine own role. He/she has to as Lainer (1997) appropriately puts it: "make students passionate participants in the instructional process" which the study suggests requires a kind of attitudinal change in the teacher too.

Limitations of the study

The data for the study was collected by the investigator directly from observation, informal interviews and reflection following classroom sessions. The fact that classrooms in many parts of India tend to be multilingual and learners tend to show a special favour for certain languages in institutions implementing the three-language formula the extent of interest to a particular language which could be English was not deeply studied save through one point of time interaction with learners, teachers of English and the community. It is not known whether such interest tended to

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falter or positively affect own interest in learning English, the language of empowerment.

Scope for further study

The review has shown that the time has come to seriously cogitate on the need for introducing a dual strand in the levels of competency which students may opt for by the time they leave school- 1) General English (basic level) for those just interested in developing the ability to communicate in English 2) An advanced level for those interested in pursuing higher education and getting a job which necessitates one developing a good command of the English language. The findings of the study can be replicated through research following which course books for the two levels may be developed.

Claim and conclusion made

This paper commenced by referring to the significance of attitude. The ensuing discussion revealed that sans the proper attitude to master the English language among learners and to an extent parents too, the problems teachers of English as a Second Language are likely to confront is immense. Many teachers take it as a challenge and try to treat individual difference with the required patience. But in a country like India where the strength of classrooms is fairly high, problems tend to persist. But for how long? Has not the time come for authorities to open their eyes and consider introducing a dual strand for teaching English in India? Perhaps it would only be appropriate to conclude this critique by quoting Martha Washington, wife of US President George Washington 1789-1797:

“The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances.”

Notes and References

1. In November 2022 the teacher trainees under the supervision of the investigator-cum-teacher educator were expected to interact with secondary level students of select Government and Aided schools as part of their Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) school induction programme. A few problems which the teacher trainees found difficult to tackle are listed below. The degree of the problem experienced identified on a three-point scale of ‘High, Average and Low’ is as follows:

- i) Problem identified as Low: Use of drugs (chewing gum type); Not entering class after break; Exchanging love letters with those of the opposite sex during class time; Insisting on the trainee to provide own’ Instagram Profile.
- ii) Problem identified as Average: Intolerant to teachers’ use of English-insisting on use of mother tongue; Negative approach to life; Absence of motivation; Restless
- iii) Problem identified as High: The ineffectiveness of popular language teaching strategies; Illegible handwriting

These are problems similar to the ones teachers of English confront in their attempt to develop the competence of learners in schools. And the investigator had for over two decades visited secondary level classrooms in schools in Kerala and select schools in other states and have found similar problems. In fact, teacher trainees taught by the teacher educator almost a decade ago, teaching in schools in different states in India have during informal interactions

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affirmed that the problems listed is similar to the ones they currently confront on a daily basis.

1. Once the investigator served as a judge for an Elocution competition at the district level. The two other judges were Pragmatic Practitioners. While evaluating, the investigator assigned a distinction for the exemplary speech delivered by a child, an Anglo-Indian whose accent and delivery matched the one of native speakers. But the other two judges awarded the lowest mark for the Anglo-Indian child. During discussions prior to finalizing the marks awarded for the competition, the two judges stated that they had awarded the lowest for the Anglo-Indian child because the child's English was incomprehensible!
2. More significantly, 'Pragmatic Practitioners' are the ones keen on overcoming the submissive mindset to colonial supremacy sometimes found in the 'Subject Smart' type of teachers. The 'Pragmatic Practitioner' on the other hand holds own culture in high esteem, and is keen on taking guidance from own culture and tradition. Often they are on a mission to drive out the 'White Man's ghost from own psyche. They often harp on the belief that an Indian can't be like a Westerner and should never try to ape the West. Hence with impunity they resort to the use of mother tongue and makes a profuse use of local texts through translation for illustrating ideas/words/concepts found in the English Course Book. While observing such teachers, one tends to get the impression that their very existence is to live a life shorn of the aroma of western culture in manners even though they have no inhibition to lap up the material comforts which are by-products of the West, such as the tendency to use perfume/ deodorants, occasionally savour Mac Donald's with Coca Cola and meticulously sing "Happy Birthday to you...May God Bless you" in the class room on the occasion of a child's birthday instead of serving 'payasm' a traditional Indian dessert.
3. This also has a socio-economic impact. Regularly being at the receiving end, living without sufficient wealth to lead a cushy life like the ones they meet daily on the street, the children realize that they are leading a miserable existence and yearn to come out of it. In short, the children of parents not so wealthy tend to grieve at own insignificance every time they compare themselves with the rich kids in the block who flaunt new clothes and ride vehicles which owing to lack of wealth they can only dream of. So, the primary urge is to distance oneself from the rich which in the long run turns out to be an aversion. And the moment the poor acquire wealth, instinctively they purchase expensive clothes to show off. But seldom do they realize that they become only a pale imitation of the rich who display a class and style that goes with wearing of the dress and living a hi-fi life. The realization is often slow and sometimes never takes place.

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